

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USMISSION NATO

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCLANT NORFOLK VA

COMUSFORAZ LAJES FLD AZ

AMCONSUL OPORTO

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 3263

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF RECENT AZORES EVENTS

REFS: (A) LISBON 3260

(B) PONTA DELGADA 199

SUMMARY: CAUTIOUS HANDLING OF INCIDENTS IN AZORES BY GOP
SUGGESTS SOME UNCERTAINTY. AS RESULT OF EVENTS, GOP WILL
PROBABLY MOVE SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY TO REINFORCE ITS POSITION
IN ISLANDS AND WHITTLE AWAY SEPARATIST LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT.
UNLESS THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT SHOWS AN UNEXPECTED SKILL IN
LEADERSHIP AND IS ABLE TO MOVE MORE QUICKLY AND DECISIVELY, THE
MOVEMENT WILL PROBABLY COME TO REPRESENT AN IRRITANT, BUT NOT A
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DANGER, TO THE GOP. THERE HAVE BEEN LIMITED HINTS IN PRESS OF

ALLEGED U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN EVENTS. END SUMMARY

1. SEVERAL FEATURES OF RECENT AZORES EVENTS DESERVE TO BE HIGHLIGHTED:

- THE JUNE 6 DEMONSTRATION WAS NOT A COORDINATED ACTION. NO SERIOUS EFFORT WAS MADE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A FAVORABLE SITUATION AND MAKE A REAL MOVE TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE. APPARENTLY THE REPORT THAT AN ATTEMPT HAD BEEN MADE TO BLOCK THE RUNWAY ON SANTA MARIA ISLAND WAS NOT TRUE.
- THE PRINCIPAL INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT LEADERS ALLOWED THEMSELVES TO BE ARRESTED AND TRANSPORTED TO ANOTHER ISLAND (FRANCO, CAMARA, INDIO, CARREIRO, DEMENESES (REF (B) PARA 1)).
- THE GOP RESPONSE WAS CAUTIOUS, PERHAPS UNCERTAIN. MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, GOP APPARENTLY DID NOT REINFORCE WITH TROOPS FROM THE MAINLAND. (WE HAVE RECEIVED ONE REPORT THAT TWO COMPANIES OF TROOPS REFUSED TO GO TO THE ISLANDS WHEN ORDERED TO DO SO. THIS REPORT IS NOT CONFIRMED, BUT COULD WELL BE TRUE IN LIGHT OF THE RECENT REFUSAL OF TROOPS TO EMBARK FOR ANGOLA.)
- GOP PUBLIC REACTION HAS BEEN MUTED: GOP HAS ISSUED NO FORMAL STATEMENTS; EX-GOVERNOR BORGES COUTINHO, AFTER TOUGH ARRIVAL STATEMENT (REFTEL A, PARA 5), HAS SOUGHT TO DOWNPLAY THE EVENTS, EVEN WHEN PRESENTED WITH LOADED QUESTIONS BY RADICAL MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES; REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL MEMBER CANTO E CASTRO, WHO WAS PRESENT IN THE AZORES DURING THE ENTIRE INCIDENT, HAS YET TO BE HEARD FROM.
- NO ATTEMPT HAS BEEN MADE THUS FAR TO EXPLOIT THESE WEEKEND EVENTS AGAINST THE U.S., DESPITE THE ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT OF PONTA DELGADA CONSULATE LOCAL EMPLOYEE VICTOR CRUZ.
- GOP HAS NOT MOVED TO USE THE AZORES INCIDENTS AS A VEHICLE FOR FURTHER LEFTWARD LURCH, AND THE LONGER THE GOP WAITS THE LESS LIKELY IT BECOMES THAT SUCH A MOVE CAN BE CREDIBLY MADE. (THIS WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BE TRUE, HOWEVER, AS REGARDS ALLEGED U.S. COMPLICITY.)

2. WE ANTICIPATE THE FOLLOWING GOP ACTIONS AS A RESULT OF AZORES INCIDENTS:

- GOP WILL MAKE AN EFFORT TO REDUCE THE LEGITIMATE ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES OF THE ISLANDERS;
- GOP WILL QUIETLY AND DELIBERATELY PUT LOYALISTS IN CHARGE OF MILITARY AND CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION OF ISLANDS;

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- GOP WILL SLOWLY PURGE ISLAND AUTHORITIES OF INDEPENDENCE SUPPORTERS AND WILL ATTEMPT TO QUASH THE MOVEMENT BY GRADUALLY DETAINING, JAILING, AND PERHAPS DEPORTING ITS LEADERS.

3. WHO WON? THE ISLANDERS GAINED AN INITIAL, PARTIAL VICTORY ON JUNE 6 BY FORCING OUT THE GOVERNOR AND BY HAVING THEIR ECONOMIC COMPLAINTS REDRESSED. AS REF (B) POINTS OUT, THEY DEMONSTRATED THE FRAGILITY OF LISBON'S CONTROL. OVER THE LONGER HAUL,

HOWEVER, IT IS LIKELY THAT THE LACK OF LEADERSHIP ABILITY IN THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE METROPOLE TO WHITTLE AWAY THE POWER OF THE SEPARATISTS. THE HALF-HEARTEDNESS AND LACK OF RISK-TAKING INITIATIVE DISPLAYED BY THE SEPARATISTS SHOULD MAKE THIS POSSIBLE, EVEN FOR THE MUDDLED GOP. UNLESS THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT SHOWS AN UNEXPECTED DEPTH AND SKILL IN ITS LEADERSHIP AND IS ABLE TO MOVE MORE QUICKLY AND DECISIVELY THAN IT DID THIS TIME, THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT WILL PROBABLY DECLINE INTO LOCALITIS AND COME TO REPRESENT AN IRRITANT, BUT NOT A DANGER, TO THE GOP.

4. ALLEGATIONS OF USG AND NATO INVOLVEMENT CONTINUE IN THE MEDIA, BUT HAVE NOT BEEN STRESSED YET AND ARE BEING MADE IN LOW KEY. THIS, AND THE GOP'S NON-EXPLOITATION OF THE INCIDENT THUS FAR, ARE WELCOME SIGNS. WE THINK IT IS TOO EARLY, HOWEVER, TO DRAW DEFINITIVE JUDGMENTS ON THIS SCORE.

5. IN VIEW OF HIS CAREFUL, NON-PROVOCATIVE HANDLING OF THE INCIDENT, THE FATE OF MILITARY GOVERNOR, GEN. MAGALHAES, WILL BE A GOOD INDICATOR OF HOW THE GOP PLANS TO DEAL WITH OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN THE AFFAIR. HE AND LTC. MIRANDA, THE LATTER A NATIVE AZOREAN, ARE LIKELY CANDIDATES FOR THE SACK IF THE GOP DECIDES THAT CONCILIATION IS NOT THE WAY TO HANDLE THE PROBLEM.
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